

Reflective Punch:

A graphic design examination of the representation of the violence in the 226 hockey fights that took place in the NHL Regular Season of 2018-19.

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Abstract

The number of hockey fights has declined in the **National Hockey League** (NHL) in recent years but still occupies a cultural and physical space in the game. Medical research and studies have revealed the possible severity of repeated hits to the head on athletes' brains in the long-term. It begs the question, "why do many players, NHL management and hockey fans choose to continue to honour fighting in the game?" This research challenges the perception and reaction to the violence seen in the 226 total fights of the 2018-19 NHL Regular Season through creative and exploratory graphic design works. This thesis demonstrates how graphic design can explain some of the complicated, violent nuances on NHL hockey ice rinks.

Keywords:

Graphic design, critical design, adversarial design, content analysis and hockey violence.

Dedication

For my son, Jack and my parents, Gilles and Pierrette Arseneault.

A trio that illustrates daily the positive sides of fighting for what is right.

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Introduction:

This thesis examines how graphic design can challenge the perception and reception of the violence seen in the 226 hockey fights during the 2018-19 NHL Regular Season. Professional hockey delivers a certain grace while viewing the game—hockey sticks looking like extensions of players' arms, the small black puck sliding purposefully on the ice, skating movements full of intricate maneuvers, supplanted by blasts of sheer force and power—all elements executed like a well-rehearsed elegant performance. The coarseness of hockey fights that emerges from the game can be a shocking display amidst the refinement of the players' talents and skills. The exchange of the violent punches is real, and the kickback reaction can be confusing. Chapter One explains how fighting functions in hockey and how players willingly accede to fighting as a way to protect and police themselves on the ice.

Chapter 2 explores how viewing of the 226 hockey fight videos during the 2018-19 NHL Regular Season was conducted using **hockeyfights.com**. In parallel to the viewing, I made numerous graphic design concepts as a form of inquiry into the subject of violence in the NHL using creative exploration and experimentation.

Chapter 3 describes the methodology for the 226 fight videos by using a systematic collection of mixed quantitative and qualitative research. The goal of the research is to synthesize the violence into a digestible statistical analysis. The research book designed for this project organizes the data and houses observations with a section dedicated to statistical analysis of the results of the research.

The final graphic design projects are discussed in Chapter 4; the projects use the lens of graphic design to confront the multifaceted nature of some of the research discoveries. The projects reflect on the findings by using **Adversarial Design** theories as Inquiry and **Critical Design** to approach the ideations of the works.

Chapter 1: Defining Fighting in the NHL

46.1 Fighting – A fight shall be deemed to have occurred when at least one player punches or attempts to punch an opponent repeatedly or when two players wrestle in such a manner as to make it difficult for the Linesmen to intervene and separate the combatants. The Referees are provided very wide latitude in the penalties with which they may impose under this rule. This is done intentionally to enable them to differentiate between the obvious degrees of responsibility of the participants either for starting the fighting or persisting in continuing the fighting. The discretion provided should be exercised realistically.¹

Hockey fights have deep roots in the sport, dating back to when the game was almost played exclusively outdoors on frozen ponds. Often regarded as an act of honour, the act of two players squaring off in a round of fisticuffs is an integral part of each player's occupational culture. At the same time, fighting in hockey is prohibited by the NHL. According to NHL Fighting Rule 46.1, the act of fighting is a penalized infraction but also gives the game's officials a 'very wide latitude in imposing the penalties'.² Simply put, fighting does not come with a mandatory ejection from the game for those involved. The benefits of fighting for teams quite often outweighs the indignation of the automatic five minute major penalty assessed as a "punishment". This contrast between the benefit and the punishment of "the fight" means that teams are willing to go against the rules and gamble on the "very wide latitude" referees have to enforce penalties to settle conflicts. **Kenneth Goldstein** explains how players adopt two separate sets of rules: the ideal rules and those by which the ideal rules are applied, misapplied, or subverted.³ The game itself does not change, but the manner of playing the game is different. The rules carefully degenerate into strategic play that players understand for the game's primary purpose: winning.

Dr. Victoria Silverwood explains how fighting violence lives inside the confinement of the arena in her Ph.D. paper *Five for Fighting*:

"Here, violence is organized through an accepted code of conduct, widely understood and acknowledged by players, spectators and regulators. Violence is organized through the culture of hockey, situated in the spectacle of entertainment, the audience often displaying a carnivalesque thirst for violence. In sport, the criminological boundaries of violence are not set and enforced by criminal justice agencies; rather they are constructed, managed and mediated through the culture of the sport and an accepted code of behaviour".⁴

¹ National Hockey League, *National Hockey League Official Rules 2019-2020*. (Rule 46.1)

² IBID

³ Tekinbaş, Katie Salen, and Eric Zimmerman. *Rules of Play: Game Design Fundamentals*. (The MIT Press, 2003), 267

⁴ Victoria Silverwood, "Five for Fighting": The Culture and Practice of Legitimised Violence in Professional Ice Hockey." Cardiff University of Social Studies (PhD, 2015).

The agreement to fight is in many ways the secret handshake of hockey; an unpublished charter referred to as “The Code” for those involved in the game. Hockey writer **Ross Bernstein** describes “The Code” as a living breathing “insider” rule that continues to evolve as NHL hockey rules get modified and adjusted.⁵ Adhering to “The Code” means that hockey players are held accountable for their actions on the ice, particularly those of an aggressive nature, in addition to those made by their teammates. *Fighters*, commonly referred to as “enforcers,” are given the responsibility on their respective teams to patrol and police the ice. Almost exclusively, each “fight” follows a similar pattern, when two players are ready to engage in a fight, many times the confrontation begins with a small conversation on the ice, some times as little as a subtle acknowledgement, followed by the dropping of their gloves which signals the acceptance to exchange punches. In his book *The Code: The Unwritten Rules of Fighting and Retaliation in the NHL*, Bernstein reduces ten main rationales for fights to emerge:

- 1. Retaliation and Retribution:** A fight occurs following cheap shots and dirty play that took place earlier in the game or a past game. A fight can be between a victim and an assailant, an enforcer and an assailant, or an enforcer and the assailant’s enforcer.
- 2. Swinging the Momentum:** *Fighters* will challenge opponents when their team is losing to gain a mental edge in the game. A *fighter* will engage in a fight to fire up his team and entertain the crowd.
- 3. Intimidation:** The presence of an enforcer on the ice can intimidate players into playing differently—a few fast punches and some verbal abuse to throw an opponent off their game.
- 4. Sending a Message:** The losing team engage in a fight at the end of the game to send a message that the next time they meet, some players will be targeted. They are leaving the team to worry about future rough play and not focused on playing their game.
- 5. Trying to Draw a Reaction Penalty:** Less-skilled player attempts to draw a higher-skilled player into a fight in order to get him off the ice, thus giving his team an advantage.
- 6. Deterrence:** Fighting serves as a deterrent from playing dirty with star players. Enforcers guard the elite players to allow room for them on the ice and protect them from injuries.
- 7. Job Security:** *Fighters* will engage in fights to get their penalties-in-minutes up to show the coach and teammates that they are valuable team members..
- 8. Protection:** Enforcers protect vital players. The best example is the Edmonton Oilers had Marty McSorley and Dave Semenko to serve as Wayne Gretzky protectors. If anybody so much as breathed on Gretzky, he had two players ready to pummel him.
- 9. Prison justice:** Like new prisoners will try to make a name for themselves when they first arrive in the clink, hockey fighters will engage in fights to let everybody know that there is a new sheriff in town. Rookie fighters are notorious for trying to goad the veteran enforcers into battle, knowing that they will garner instant respect if they win.

⁵ Ross Bernstein, “The Code: The Unwritten Rules of Fighting and Retaliation in the NHL”. (Triumph Books, 2006).

10. Bad Blood: Personal feuds can have a long history that goes back for years, and fights will arise to settle old scores. Bad blood can exist between two teams, mainly when one has dominated the other for a long time.⁶

The NHL 2018-19 Regular Season witnessed a total of 226 fights, 904 fists—all in the name of their teammates and team—devoted to inflicting physical harm on their opponent. Over many years and generations of players, coaches, and fans, the violence and brutality contained in the hockey fights are carefully designed and widely accepted. Inside the confinement of the arenas, the physical pain caused by one player to another is normalized. The lore of fighting in hockey runs so deep that it has spawned a state of numbness to the physical and mental harm done. Beatriz Colomina states, “the world has developed an ability to watch everything yet do nothing. This lack of action is also designed. Neglect has been shaped.”⁷ The purpose of the research is to take a closer look at—and to challenge through a detailed visual examination—this culture of “acceptance” that permeates the simple yet the often barbaric act of fighting in hockey, of two players throwing punches at each other, with the sole intention of causing “damage” to their opponent in the name of honour to their team.

In 2018-19 the NHL regular season saw the fewest fights in modern NHL history; 226. The graph (figure 1) below illustrates the slight decrease of hockey fights per season for the last ten NHL seasons. We visually see a slow decline; a percentage of 17.78% of games were played with hockey fights compare to 40% of games in the 2009-10 season. Despite the decline in the frequency of on-ice fights still appeal to many hockey enthusiasts—fans, NHL management and players among them—with a stubborn resistance to eliminate them completely.

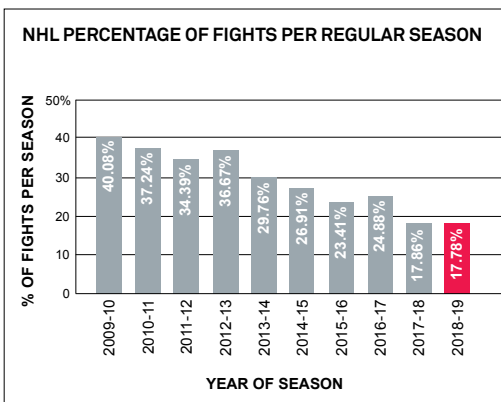


Figure 1. Last 10 years of fights during NHL regular season. Data collected from *hockeyfights.com*.

⁶ Ross Bernstein, “The Code: The Unwritten Rules of Fighting and Retaliation in the NHL”. (Triumph Books, 2006), Chapter 3.

⁷ Beatriz Colomina, and Mark Wigley, “Are We Human? Notes on an Archaeology of Design”. (Lars Müller Publishers, 2016).

In the documentary *The Last Gladiators*, retired NHL enforcer Chris Nilan shared his thoughts on why some fans find hockey fights so appealing “...at one time or another, they (the fans) probably wanted to punch someone in the mouth, and they never get to do it. Nevertheless, they (the fans) sure like to see someone else do it.”⁸ Dr. Silverwood elaborates on Nilan’s point by stating that the emotional reaction that some spectators find appealing in hockey fights may lie in an innate desire to see justice being served in society, and within the constraints of the hockey rinks, watching justice served on the ice, helps to fill that longing for justness.⁹ NHL management and owners are reluctant to eliminate fighting in the league because they recognize that the NHL in addition to being a sporting entity, is an entertainment company that puts the highest premium on revenues, for the league as well as for the teams that make up the league. Furthermore, from its very beginnings over a century ago to the present day, the NHL’s primary income source has been ticket sales. In the journal article, *Blood Sport and Cherry Pie: Some Economics of Violence in the National Hockey League*, the writers suggest that “hockey is show biz, hockey is a blood sport for all NHL teams.” To correct the situation, they propose two solutions; to either wean fans away from hockey violence or sanction some form of government intervention.¹⁰ The lowering in numbers of fights per season in the past ten years may be a way of slowly and gradually eradicating them from the game. Nevertheless, that process remains problematic to the financial bottom line of the key NHL decision-makers.

⁸ Alex Gibney, “The Last Gladiators”. DVD, Documentary. (Phase 4 Films, 2013).

⁹ Scorgie, Adam. “Ice Guardians”. DVD, Documentary. (Ustream Flix, 2016).

¹⁰ Jones, Ferguson, and Stewart. “Blood Sports and Cherry Pie: Some Economics of Violence in the National Hockey League.” *The American Journal of Economics and Sociology* 52, no. 1 (January 1993), 63–78.

Chapter 2: Viewing, Learning and Making

Visually examining each of the 226 hockey fights that made up the 2018-19 NHL Regular Season was done in real-time as they happened by accessing the video archives found on the website *hockeyfights.com*. Hockeyfights.com—is a statistical archive founded in 1999 by hockey paleontologist **David Singer** and serves as a reference for media, players, agents and fans. Each fight video is uploaded within hours of the conclusion of games alongside supporting information such as the date, time, names of the players involved, the NHL teams involved, and an interactive section for the website's members to leave their comments.

The research intent in watching these fight videos was to have the freedom to explore the unique visual language each fight presented. However, analyzing the different fight videos without feeling a sense of empathy for the pain caused by—and inflicted on—the *fighters* became a much more difficult task than anticipated. The growing concern of seeing potential injuries or pain done to *fighters* was always present. It clouded the process of viewing the exchange between the *fighters* benignly, and applying **Roland Barthes**'s literary theory described in his essay *From Work to Text*¹¹ provided a mindful separation between my emotions and analyzing the content. Barthes' theory puts forth the position that "Work" is a physical thing; it occupies a physical space such as a book, a film, or in this particular example, a hockey fight video. "Work" is definite and complete, whereas "Text" is the meaning the reader/observer takes from the "Work," and it sits in a zone with no limitations. The "Text" separates the individual(s) who created the "Work" and focused on the effect it has after its completion. Therefore, "Text" does not possess a definite meaning; it holds an infinite amount of meanings and suggests that it can shift over time; it is not static or fixed. Recognizing that the fights were created by the *fighters* but once the physical confrontations end the videos continue to live in a space where an interminable amount of meanings allows the viewer to reflect and research.

¹¹ Barthes, Roland. "From Work to Text." In *Image Music Text*, 155–64. New York, NY: Hill and Wang: S. Heath Trans., 1977.

Making While Thinking

In order to fully absorb the subject and observe the details of the movements of the *fighters* in their totality, repeated viewings of each fight video were required. Also, a large amount of rough creative ideas, experiments and collection of images of hockey book covers, hockey art and ephemera were amassed on an Instagram account—

www.instagram.com/nadine.design—which served as the seedling for some of the final projects but was an outlet that allowed me to immerse myself in the subject of hockey fighting. In her book *The Storm of Creativity*, author Kyna Leski describes the benefits of putting together information this way:

“The gathering itself happens through the senses, through the eyes, hands, ears, and so on. It happens in the form of perception. By gathering, you bring together to discern. You gather to speak and reason through words. You gather to know. You gather to find the connections between things from part to part and part to whole.”¹²

The creative space forms a triffecta of making, learning and contemplating. Priority was placed on learning the history of fighting in the NHL via a hockey history course offered by the **Hockey Hall of Fame**, many conversations with various hockey writers/journalists, researching at the **Hockey Hall of Fame’s D.K. Seaman Resource Centre**, becoming an active member of the **Society of International Hockey Research** and attending numerous hockey events/conferences. In the text *From The Past with Love* in the book, *Slow Reader. A resource for Design Thinking and Practice* the triumvirate of **Olafur Eliasson, Eric Ellingsen & Christina Werner** explain how thinking, learning and making are element parts of the creative process:

“We do not pronounce ahead of time what we think we need to know... We try to learn how to learn, so we learn where we have to go by doing. We evaluate and critique ourselves along the way, and together, and always, and all ways... We believe in risking vulnerability and practicing in the robust discomfort of uncertainty. A shared vulnerability is important. We believe in getting out of comfort zone... We believe in an economy of effort. Of making an effort. In rejection that offer alternatives. We believe in thinking doing, in the active imagination as an agent in the world, in shaping and being shaped by the world, in causing the world to wobble differently. And we believe art is part of the world wobbling differently.”¹³

The long process of making experimental work and learning the history of fighting in the NHL brought a new perspective and understanding of the violence as witnessed in the fight videos. The discovery of the purpose of fighting in the NHL came with a surprising appreciation for the role of the *fighters* as their frailty and fragility became more noticeable. My first impressions of the fighting brutes soon gave way to seeing young players, largely

¹² Kyna Leski and John Maeda. “The Storm of Creativity”, Cambridge, Massachusetts: (The MIT Press, 2016), 51.

¹³ Ana Paula Pais, Carolyn F. Strauss, Yochai Benkler, and Maria Blaisse, eds. “Slow Reader: A Resource for Design Thinking and Practice”, (Valiz, 2016).

innocent, who place little thought of the long-term effects of injuries they might sustain in their hockey careers. The desire to play for the NHL is instilled early on in hockey players; many will sacrifice their physical and mental well-being just for the opportunity to play in the NHL. *Fighters* are especially vulnerable to this way of thinking because they know that their position on the team, and in the NHL for that matter, is dependent not on their skill with the puck but on their aptitude with their fists. The pressure to police the ice and protect their teams is constant—the “fighter” must prove themselves as a valuable member to their team over and over again by dropping their gloves and exchanging punches with their opponent, who almost always is a mirror image of themselves.



Figure 2. Sample of works from www.instagram.com/nadine.design/

Project One: The Agreement

The exploratory first project focuses on the delicate fragility of the fights, a collection of 226 line drawings. These images represent the agreement *fighters* make before dropping their gloves to fight. The line drawings were a slow, repetitive and meticulous activity that allowed for a more in-depth inquiry into fight. Through repeated viewings, the individual fights emerged as an elaborate visual display, a series of dramatic dances with sneers, clutches, pulls, punches, and fancy skating moves that sometimes provided probable hints of the intent of the battle. The fighters'

body movements reveal how controlled and calculated most of the moves are in the fights exposing the feasible training hockey fighters receive in combat while wearing ice skates. Some moves showed glimpses of tender embraces between *fighters* engaged in entangled honourable battles. As the project progressed, the reframing of the fight videos was repeated—resulted in viewing them through different lenses, sometimes as honourable, violent, respectful, gladiator-like, romantic and back to brutal. **Donald Schon** explains this development—*reflection-in-action*—as experimenting in reframing problematic situation by stating:

“In this reflective conversation, the practitioner’s effort to solve the reframed problem yields new discoveries which call for new reflection-in-action. The process spirals through stages of appreciation, action, and reappreciation. The unique and uncertain situation comes to be understood through the attempt to change it, and changed through the attempt to understand it.”¹⁴

Understanding the subject is a process; it is not linear, it takes twists and turns and reexaminations—it took time to ingest the subject. Identifying the violence in the fight videos is a cryptic exercise, uncovering many levels of brutality. In most of the fights, the *fighters* clearly acknowledged each other at the onset of the confrontation and asked for permission by dropping their hockey gloves to the ice to signal the start of the fistic exchanges. Also, most fights concluded by either the linesmen breaking up the fight or by the *fighters* skating in a calm, collected manner to the penalty boxes to serve their punishment. The project—*The Agreement* assembles the 226 line drawings in a journal-like book with the fight’s date, the names of the *fighters* and their associated teams. The design draws inspiration from wedding invitations as a way to display the formal agreement that *fighters* make before engaging in battle. As an effort to open dialogues through social media, the drawings were posted on Instagram with a small description—[instagram.com/hockey_fights_2018_19](https://www.instagram.com/hockey_fights_2018_19). The engagement received on Instagram was limited to fans of hockey fights with messages consisting of fist pumps emoji and wordy accolades of the violence. This project gave way to the revelation for a more detailed and organized research project; it proved to be the beginning of the collection of data.

¹⁴ Donald A Schon, “The Reflective Practitioner: How Professionals Think In Action”, (Basic Books, 1984), location 1994 of 6243.

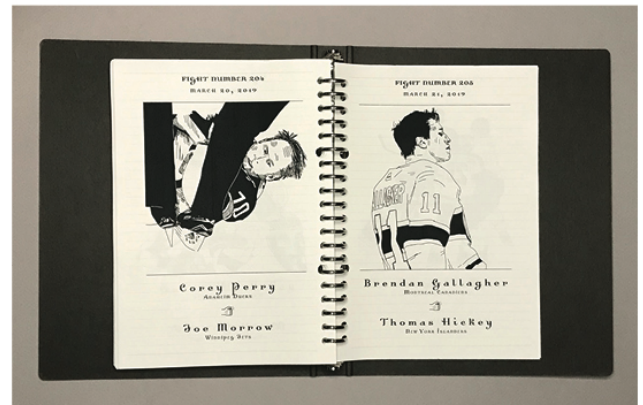
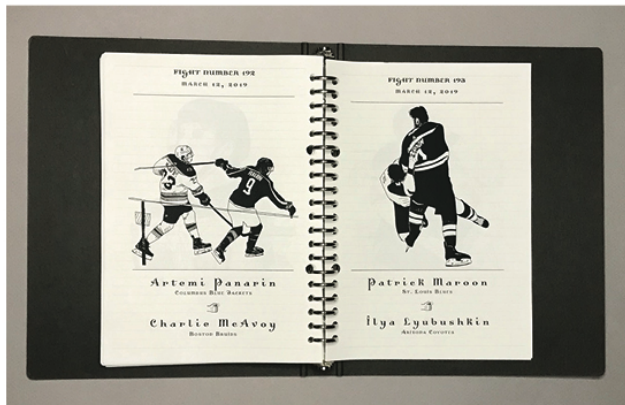
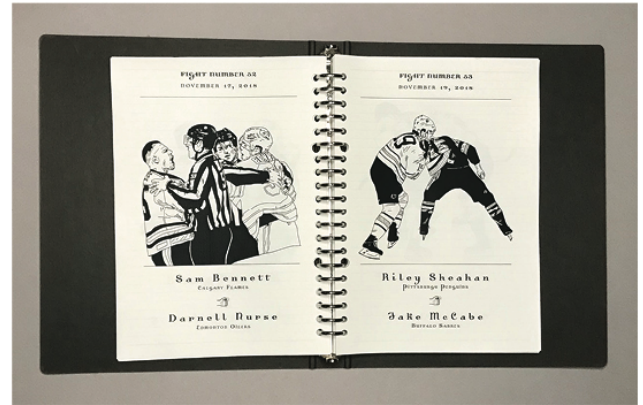
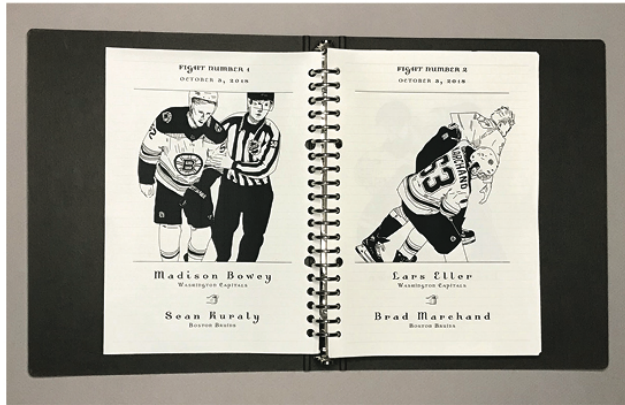


Figure 3. Sample layouts from *Journal: The Agreement*.

Chapter 3: Research Methodology, Collection of Data, Observations and Statistical Analysis.

Each of the fight videos were put in order by using Content Analysis to systematically examine the individual videos. **Gillian Rose** describes the following four steps to Content Analysis: 1-Find images; 2-Devise categories for coding; 3-Code the images; 4-Analyze the results. Rose highlights the crucial stage of “coding” for practical content analysis by attaching a set of descriptive labels to the visuals being researched. Furthermore, Rose explains the usefulness of content analysis as a way for visual critical methodology by quoting **Lutz and Collins**:

“Although at first blush it might appear counterproductive to reduce the rich material in any photograph to a small number of codes, quantification does not preclude or substitute for qualitative analysis of the pictures. It does allow, however, discovery of patterns that are too subtle to be visible on casual inspection and protection against an unconscious search through the magazine for only those which confirm one’s initial sense of what the photos say or do. (Lutz and Collins 1993: 89)”¹⁹

Description of how I adopted Rose’s four steps to Content Analysis for my research:

1-FIND IMAGES: The 226 fight videos were gathered using the extensive video archive housed on the website hockeyfights.com. The fight videos are listed in chronological order, from the most recent to the oldest. Each of the videos contains a few seconds of the play leading up to the commencement of hostilities, the complete fight and a few seconds after the fisticuffs’ conclusion. Sometimes the videos offer subtle visual clues of why the fight started but more than often, the fight results from an earlier play in the game or settling of a score from a past game that is not shown on the videos.

2-DEVISING CATEGORIES: In order to come to a complete analysis of each of the fights, a mix of quantitative and qualitative research methods was employed to gather precise data and add some more narrative description. The quantitative descriptions represent the “facts” that make up each of the fights. The qualitative descriptions—a self-imposed set of predetermined criteria—were conducted by writing reflections and observing the semiotics seen in the fight videos. Here is the list of the final selected codes:

¹⁹ Gillian Rose, “Visual Methodologies: An Introduction to the Interpretation of Visual Materials”. (SAGE Publications, 2016).

CODE (Quantitative Research Approach):

Measurable data.

1-Numeric sequence of the fight.

2-Date of the fight.

3-Time of the fight.

4-Names of the *fighters* and the NHL team they represent.

5-Nationality/place of birth of the *fighters*.

6-Player position of the *fighters*.

7-Height and weight of the *fighters*.

8-Numbers of punches per fight from each of the *fighter's*.

CODE (Qualitative Research Approach):

Personal observations from the fight videos.

9-Rating from 0-5. (A rating system was established to evaluate the brutality.

A 5 rating indicating very violent and 0 not very violent.)

10-Description of the reason for the fight. (If seen on video.)

11-Description of the fight. (If seen on video.)

12-Visible blood on the *fighters* and location of the blood. (If seen on video.)

13-Description of any visible expression of the people off the ice.

(Fans, coaches, and other players.)

3-CODING IMAGES: A formulated form was designed to collect all of the data and written observations to process all the information—every fight had a page dedicated to the collection of each of the codes listed above, plus an image of the fight done by using a screen capture of the fight video. (see Image 4 below for example) With all of the 226 fights information completed, the raw data (Appendix XX) moved into a stage of synthesizing the information per code through data visualizing. The statistical analysis used graphs and charts to visualize each code except for the descriptive written sections such as code 10-Description of the reason for the fight; 11-Description of the fight and 13-Description of the location of the blood.

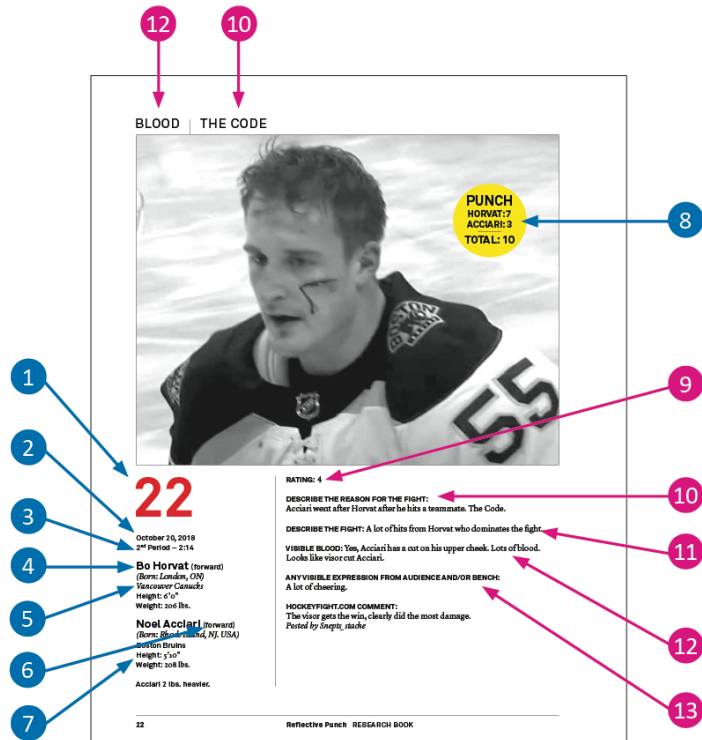


Figure 4. Example of research form and how data was collected.

4-ANALYZING THE RESULTS: I designed a book to house the three sections of the research: **1-Data and Observations**, the collection was done using the devised categories; **3-Found Moments**, a photo section dedicated to thought-provoking moments from some of the qualitative research of the fight videos; and **2-Statistical Analysis**, the charts and graphs designed by tallying the quantitative research. The detailed exercise of the collection I examined turned out to be a long and detailed process; the most critical discovery came by way of the tabulated result of the number of punches exchanged during the season.

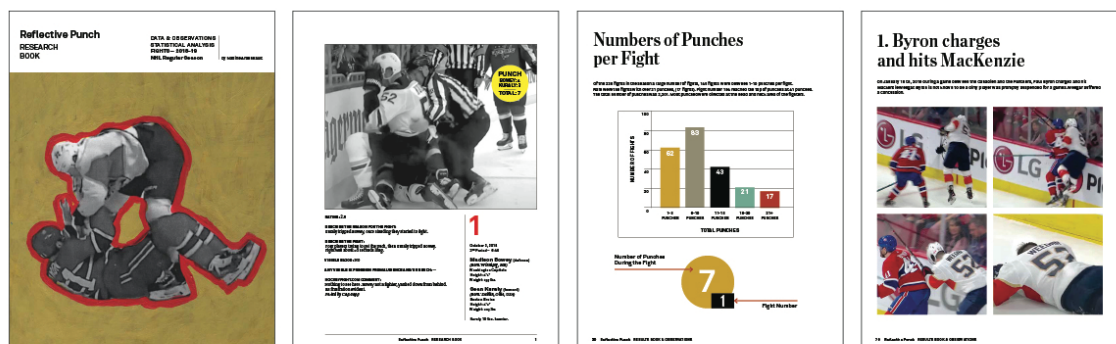


Figure 5. Cover of Research Book and sample layouts.

Important Finding: Repeated Blows to the Head

During the examination, I counted 2,021 punches exchanged by *fighters*, with the vast majority of punches directed to the head or back of the neck with a tiny portion of the punches delivered to the side of the rib cage and other parts of the body. In tandem with reading various papers and medical studies, a key finding in the course of the research led me to question the long-term effects of repeated blows to the head that can be seen in some players. Much research and writings have been recently completed on **Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy** (CTE), a severe type of brain degeneration associated with repeated blows to the head that can only be diagnosed by a post-mortem examination of the brain. **Jeremy Allingham**, author of *Major Misconduct: The Human Cost of Fighting in Hockey*, explains what CTE can do to the brain:

“CTE can lead to mental health issues including depression and anxiety. It can spur violent behaviour because of impaired judgment and lack of impulse control. That violence is usually directed at the people who care about the CTE sufferer most. CTE is associated with a risk of developing Parkinson’s disease and with dementia. The desperate need to dull the roaring discomfort of CTE can also lead to self-medication: substance use and eventually addiction.”²⁰

In 2018, the NHL settled a lawsuit with more than 300 retired players for \$18.9 million in payments and medical treatments but denied any liability in the settlement. The lawsuit alleged that the NHL had profited off of violence while ignoring warnings from the scientific community about the risks of brain trauma and, in result failed to keep players informed of the dangers and failed to keep them safe from long-term brain injuries. The NHL’s refusal to acknowledge any liability in the settlement serves as an essential indication of the lack of responsibility the NHL is willing to offer to its players while playing hockey and after they retire from playing, especially those who embrace the art of fighting.

²⁰ Jeremy Allingham, “Major Misconduct: The Human Cost of Fighting in Hockey”. (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2019), location 1300 of 3352.

Chapter 4

Visual Explorations in Response to Some Research Discoveries

The final graphic design projects explore a pathway for further reflections with regards to some of the discoveries found in the research and analysis. These projects do not address, or for that matter propose, a solution to the issue of fighting in hockey but rather grab the results and aim to challenge the reception and perception of the violence in hockey fights by using design theory: **Adversarial Design as Inquiry** and **Critical Design**.

Carl DiSalvo describes the term *Adversarial Design* as a practice that uses the means and forms of design to challenge beliefs, values, facts by questioning conventional approaches to critical issues. He elaborates that Adversarial Design as Inquiry is a process of skilled examination and reconstructions that renders problematic situations sense-able.²¹ These projects also use *Critical Design* to create subjective interpretations of the violence seen in hockey fights as a mode of discourse. The intent of the projects is to encourage the viewer to reflect and or engage in discourse to affect the intellect; a form of discursive commentary through design. **Matthew Malpass** explains Critical Design used this way as a simplified but diversified way to understand ideas and entertain comprehension of a complicated issue.²²

Final Project 1:

My Skin is Your Skin: Series of 10 Ceiling Banners.

Ten players tied for first place for most fights by one individual during the 2018-19 season, with each combatant engaging in six different fights. This project is a series of 10 ceiling banners to honour the *fighters* exploits; the banners carry a perspective of expression rather than function. Using each player's face as the base of the image, I took pieces of each of the opponents that they engaged with—ears, nose, eyes, chin, forehead—and recomposed his face into a distorted composite image.

²¹ Carl DiSalvo. "Adversarial Design". Design Thinking, Design Theory. Cambridge, Mass: (MIT Press, 2012).

²² Matthew Malpass, "Critical Design in Context: History, Theory, and Practices", (2019).

Most *fighters* are proud of their pugilistic skills and boastfully carry their fight logs throughout their career and retirement as a badge of honour. The banners use Critical Design as a disparaging satirical commentary in response to a serious issue. Matthew Malpass states:

“Critical design practice employs satire as a particular form of humour. Satire is the art of diminishing a subject by making it ridiculous and evoking attitudes of amusement, contempt, scorn or indignation towards it. In design’s various critical practices, satire functions as constructive social criticism. This is done with the intent of shaming individuals, the disciples, and society into improvement. Satire has long been used as a device to offer critique, but it also provides a provocative lens by which to examine design’s forms of critical practice.”²³

The ceiling banners that hang in the NHL arenas are in honour of celebrating elite players’ accomplishments. They are not to point out players who engage in violence. Fighters get celebrated differently in the NHL; they get cherished surreptitiously for how well they protect their teammates.



Figure 6. My Skin is Your Skin. Series of 10 ceiling banners.

²³ Matthew Malpass, “Critical Design in Context: History, Theory, and Practices”, (2019).

Final Project 2:

Codify: Series of 73 monoprint.

The research revealed 73 fights using “The Code”—where a player fought in honour of a teammate enduring a rough play from an adversary—this project produced 73 monoprints to illustrate each of those fights. Each monoprint holds a series of secret design codes to explain some of the findings related to “The Code” from the hockey season. Here are the design codes devised for the making of the monoprints:

- 1. PUCK:** Each monoprint has one puck imprint that acts as a symbol to illustrate the fights using “The Code”. A red puck imprint signifies a fight with blood. A black puck imprint communicates no blood seen in the fight video.
- 2. HOCKEY TAPE:** Each monoprint houses a specific number of black hockey tape pieces that correspond to the 0 to 5 rating established during the research project.
- 3. PENCIL LINE:** Each monoprint has a blind drawing pencil line done while viewing the specific fight video with “The Code”.
- 4. NUMERAL:** Each monoprint has a number that matches the sequential number of the fight given to each fight during the research project.

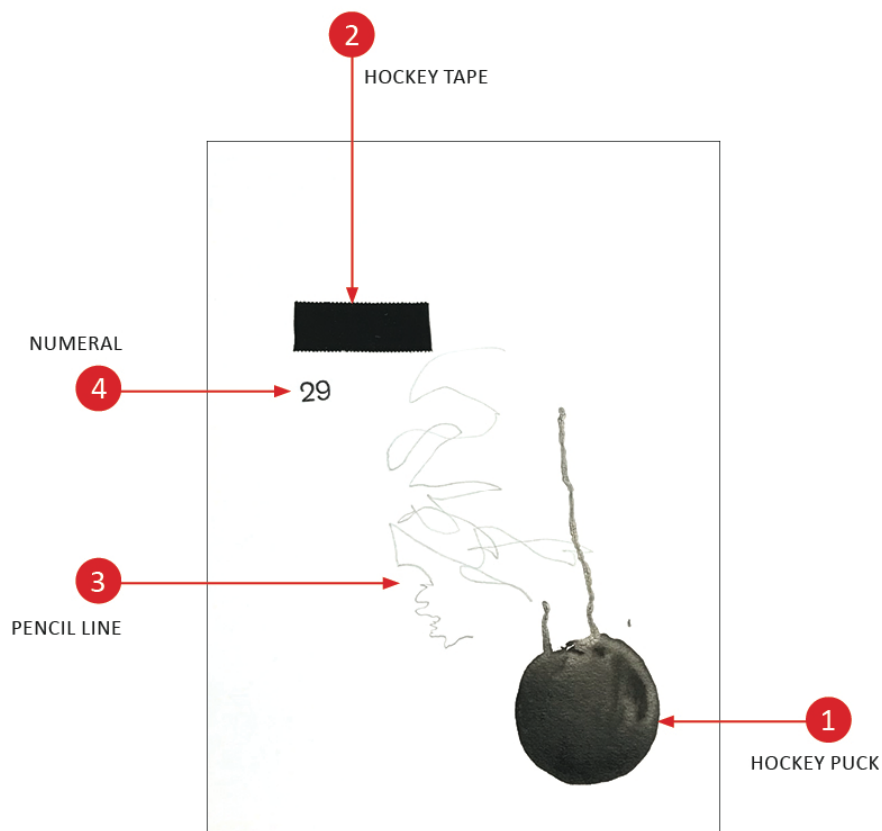


Figure 7. Monoprint example of how the design codes were applied.

The abstract nature of the monoprints aims to speak to how cryptic “The Code” can be in hockey fights. I observed 73 fights that use “The Code” as the premise of the fight, but in reality, the number is probably much higher. I was limited in my research to what I observed in the fight videos, to determine the real number of fights that use “The Code” would have required more extensive research. Using the four design codes listed above proved to be a rigid execution of each monoprints' design as the method by nature is supremely formulated and calculated. The intentional method complemented the methodical way fights with “The Code” unfold on the ice—a player responding to another player’s dishonourable act. The monoprints also speak to the calculated insider understanding that the referees and linesmen negotiate while officiating during these events. Ross Bernstein explains:

“When it comes to the code, officials have to closely watch the drama and story line of each game so that they can follow how justice will be meted out by the players. They need to know when to let things transpire, and when to “swallow their whistles. It is always a balancing act to make sure things don’t get out of hand.”²⁴

The perimeters of the violence in fights on the ice are undeniably framed by referees and linesmen who are willing to bend the game rules to let the fight transpire. The methodology used in making the monoprints borrow the same measured and orderly action employed by the referees and linesmen and the players who engage in the fight.

²⁴ Ross Bernstein, “The Code: The Unwritten Rules of Fighting and Retaliation in the NHL” (Triumph Books, 2006), location 3387 of 4790.

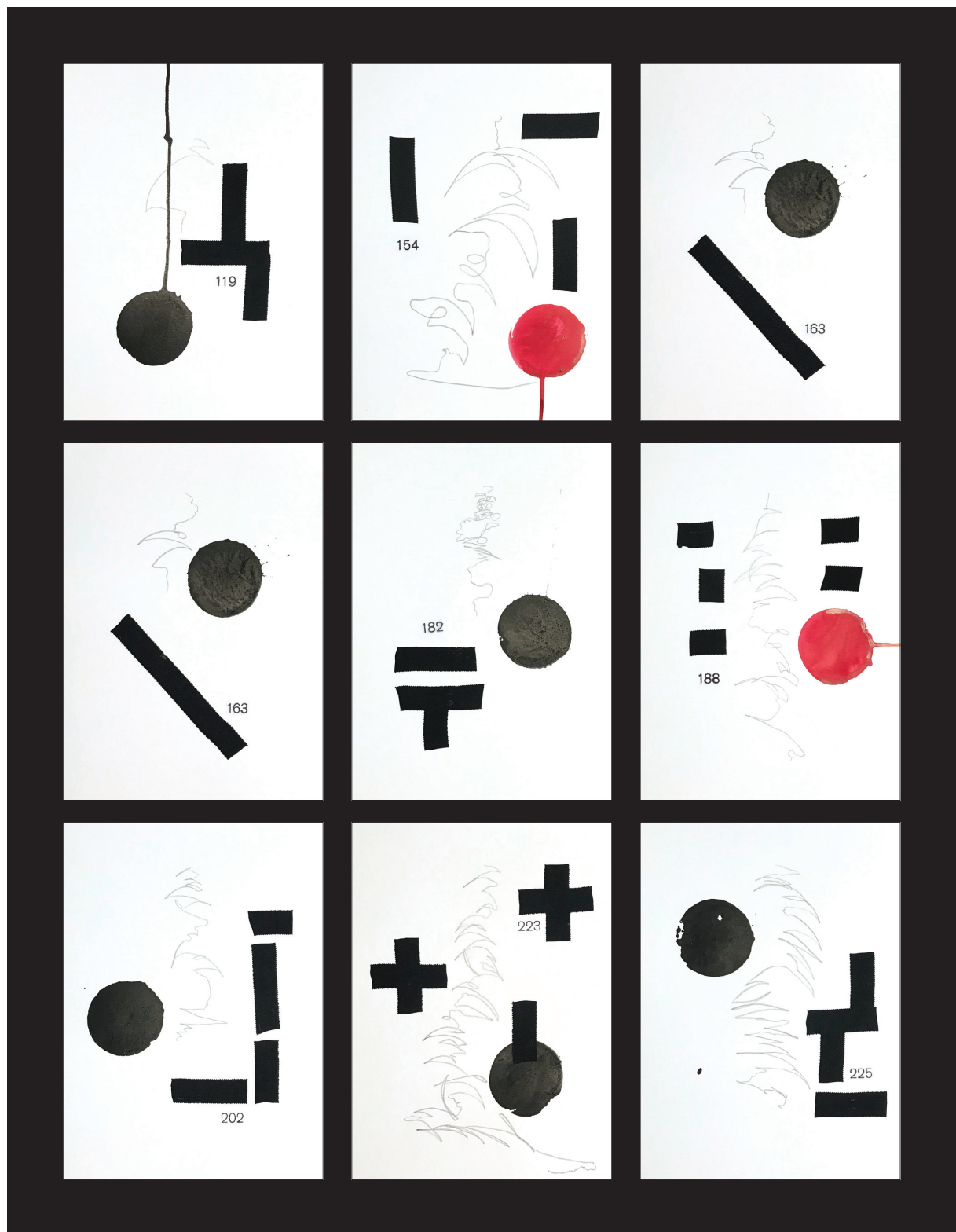


Figure 8. Sample of Monoprint project.

Final Project 3a:

Bloody Nails: Hockey glove with 39 nails

I counted 39 separate fights with visible blood on one or both of the *fighter(s)* during my research. The blood was mostly located on the fighters' hands and or faces. Most punches were directed towards the head of players; however, when their punches landed on their opponent's helmet, this resulted in hand and face lacerations from hitting hard, protective equipment. Blood is undoubtedly not a pre-indicator of the intensity of the injuries *fighters* may get subjected to during fights, but it is a clear visual cue that notifies the viewers that brutal force resulted in inflicting punishment.

The 3D object serves as a form of storytelling through a data visualization object; it functions as a form of design reflection rather than an object of utility. The hockey glove represents a fist, and the 39 nails with red paint represent the 39 fight videos seen with blood. The usage of pointy nails acts as an indicator the pain and suffering endured by the combatants.

This project uses Adversarial Design as Inquiry by making a contestation object that points at the manifestation of the violence; it is meant to be considered representational and a socially critical charged object. DiSalvo suggests that these kinds of inquiry can transform the messy elements of a situation into an experience that allows one to sense it and make sense of it.²⁵

²⁵ Carl DiSalvo, "Adversarial Design. Design Thinking, Design Theory". (MIT Press, 2012), location 2247-2289 of 3069.



Figure 9. Different views of Bloody Nails project.

Final Project 3b:

Fist + Flesh + Blood: Book representing fights with blood.

The same findings led to a second project that involved the 39 fights that featured blood. This project's images were made by using pieces of raw meat soaked in ink and then viciously stamped on paper by using my fist and a hammer. These admittedly “crude” images were then used in layouts alongside detailed text to describe the 39 fights. The layouts were collected in a book form and printed on vellum paper. Vellum paper is made out of cellulose fibres, which is an essential factor for this project's overall organic feel; some vellum papers are made from calfskin and would have been an even better choice to convey the delicate attributes of skin. The paper choice and printing speak to the transparency of skin by showcasing each layout's pellucidity seen through the pages of the book. The harshness of the images and the paper's fragility is a dedication to the fragility of the tenacious young men who believe so deeply in their dreams of playing for the NHL that it outweighs both the risks of bodily injury and the long-term effects.



Figure 10. Images of the making process of the images for *Fist + Flesh + Blood*.

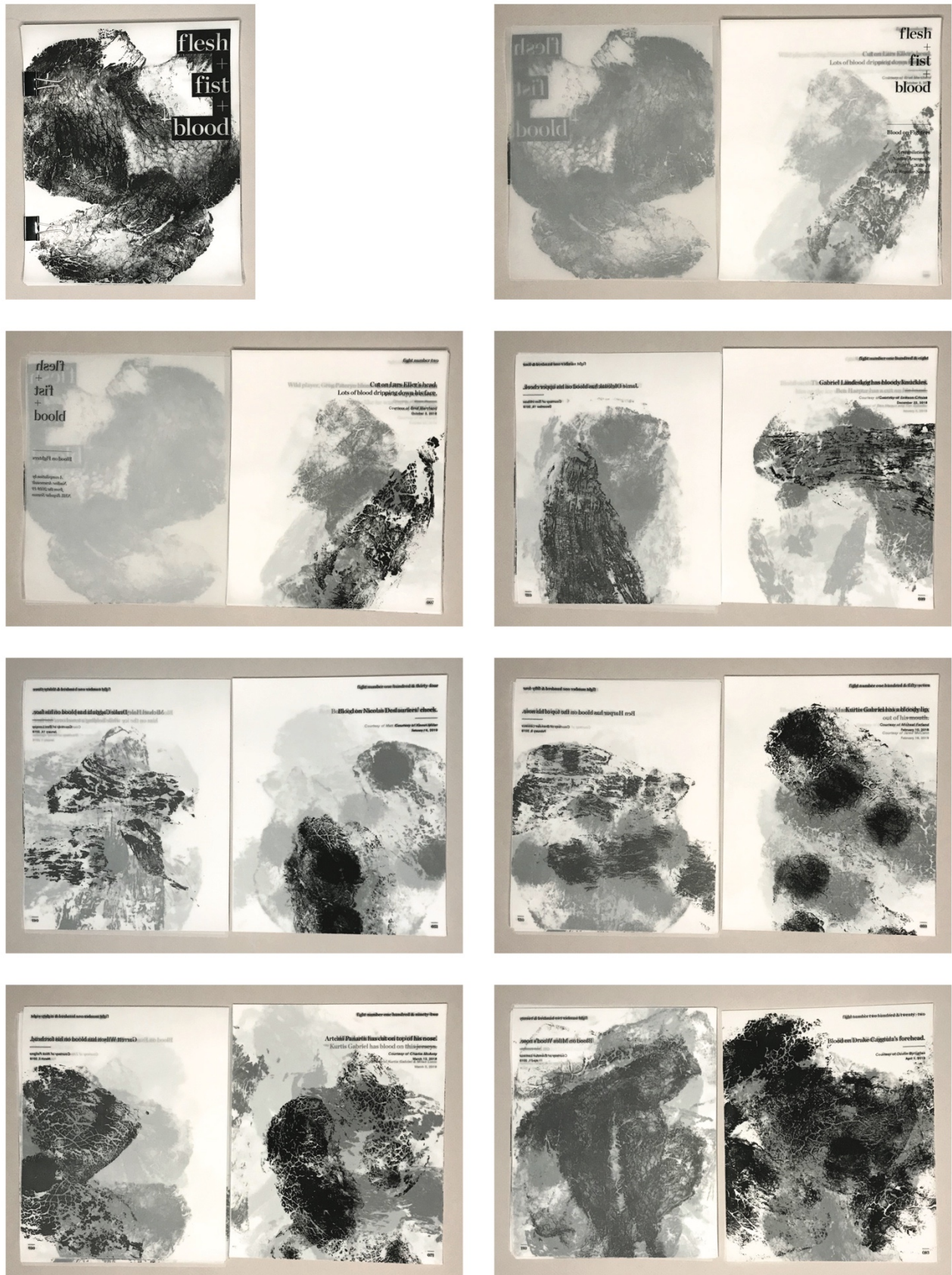


Figure 11. Cover and sample layouts of *Fist + Flesh + Blood*.

Final Project 4:

Counting Punches: Book representing the punches in each fight.

The last project is a book dedicated to the sobering reality of the total 2,021 punches counted during this thesis's research stage. Science tells us that CTE is caused by repeated blows to the head; but how many blows does it take? Jeremy Alingham points out, “for many players, the fact that CTE cannot be pinpointed provides an excuse to ignore the possible devastation that may await them. They push it down the road. If you only find out after you die, why worry now?”²⁶

The images for this project were produced using Suminagashi, an ancient Japanese marbling technique of ink, water and paper. The approach is to drop ink carefully to float on still water, which forms delicate circular swirls, each additional drop of ink pushes away from the inner circle, and the process of repeating drips of ink forms a unique, organic result that is impossible to repeat. The floating concentric spiral design is then picked up by laying a sheet of newsprint on the water to transfer the ink to the paper. The ambiguity of the images made using this technique mimics the fact that CTE cannot be diagnosed easily in players who get subjected to repeated blows to the head. No two hits are the same; no two brains are the same—the risk of injury is always present, and like the lines formed with Suminagashi, some are more consequential than others. The result of the Suminagashi images are as delicate as our brains are to repeated blows to the head. Each drip of ink represents a hit to the head; 2,021 drips of ink over 226 images, each image illustrating a fight from the NHL 2018-19 Regular Season. Once the 226 Suminagashi images were completed, I added colour by using coloured pencils as a way to “bruise” the images.

This project utilizes Critical Design as a form of non-rational design; DiSalvo explains this by using Gaver, Beaver, and Benford to “discuss the opportunities that non-rational design and ambiguity bring when designed into objects. Ambiguity in design impels people to interpret situations for themselves; it encouraged the user to start grappling conceptually with objects, systems, and their contexts and thus establishes deeper and more personal relations with the meaning offered.”²⁷ Freeing the viewer to react to the work with their interpretations. The book is repetitive and

²⁶ Jeremy Allingham, “Major Misconduct: The Human Cost of Fighting in Hockey”. (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2019), location 1343 of 3352.

²⁷ Matthew Malpass, “Critical Design in Context: History, Theory, and Practices”, 2019, 65.

meant to be contemplative by digesting the large number of circular lines representing the blows to the head. All of which leads to the most critical of questions.

“How many is enough?”

Furthermore, judging by the continued willingness to continue engaging in such a harmful activity, despite knowing all too well the potential risks and consequences; fans, players, coaches, officials, and most telling NHL management, are willing to place hockey, the economics of the sport and in particular, the unwritten code of the game, ahead of the humanity of those that they share the ice with, and sadly their own, all too often, resulting in repeated tragic outcomes.



Figure 12. Example of one of the black ink Suminagashi image I created on the left and how I added coloured pencils to “bruise” the image on the right for the *Counting Punches* project.

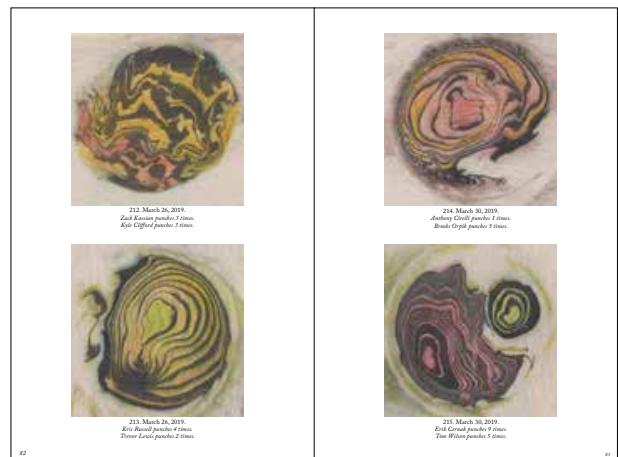


Figure 13. Cover and sample layouts of *Counting Punches*.

Conclusion

The large volume of creative work made for this thesis had importance in providing me with the space to investigate the subject of violence in hockey. The many hours spent on the creative ideations and project provided time to view, learn, make and is best described by quoting lines from “Four Quartets” a poem by T.S. Eliot:

What we call the beginning is often the end
And to make an end is to make a beginning.
The end is where we start from...
We shall not cease from exploration
And the end of all our exploring
Will be to arrive where we started
And know the place for the first time.
Through the unknown, unremembered gate
When the last of earth left to discover
Is that which was the beginning²⁸

The research did not change my perception of violence in hockey but it did reinforce my belief that repeated blows to the head and the possible long-term effects need further awareness and scientific research to bring a change of attitude towards hockey fighting in the NHL. The violence in hockey fights is not a random act but a set of highly organized tactical actions that are initiated to benefit teams. Such a “change” will need to originate at the grassroots level of the sport, where the “belief” in hockey’s more violent practices needs to be stopped before it starts. And particularly in youth hockey, where parents, coaches and administrators need to coalesce around the notion of “non-violence” in order to keep the players, predominantly at this young, vulnerable stage in their development, safe from the potential long-term effects of brain injury.²⁹

The main objective of this thesis was to contribute to the dialogue of hockey violence in the NHL by using graphic design. The meticulous examination of the 226 fights using graphic design as the tool for inquiry proved beneficial for conducting the detailed research analysis. Amassing an extensive amount of data was a tedious exercise but necessary to fully grasp the intensity of the fights and to gain the authority to comment on the violence. Working without knowing what I was specifically looking for proved to be disorienting until I adopted the structure of content analysis to organize the data collected and begin to look at the results of the individual devised code. This investment made it possible for me to participate in discussions that are not strictly about design. Daniel van der

²⁸ Kyna Leski and John Maeda, “The Storm of Creativity. Simplicity : Design, Technology, Business, Life”. (The MIT Press, 2016), 166.

²⁹ Jeremy Allingham, “Major Misconduct: The Human Cost of Fighting in Hockey”. (Arsenal Pulp Press, 2019), location 3128 of 3352.

Velden explains this ideology by stating that designers gain by doing work that is not assigned by a client with a framework of conditions attached to a project; he explains:

“Let the designer take on the debate with the institutions, the brand names or the political parties, without it all being about getting the job or having the job fail. Let designers offer the surplus value, the uselessness and the authorship of their profession to the world, to politics, to society.”³⁰

Theories of Critical Design and Adversarial Design as Inquiry grounded the approach of my projects, with many of them using satire as a tool. Applying satire to the projects made them ambiguous, reinforcing the opinion people already have vis-à-vis hockey fighting—whether it is loathing the savagery of fighting or praising hockey *fighters*—causing the projects to have a bias perception. The projects appeal to both camps by acting as objects of homage or a sombre judgements of the violence.

Finally, this thesis employed hockey violence as the research area, but the methodology developed can be adapted to other complex issues. By making a lot of work while thinking, learning and researching, graphic designers can position themselves as significant contributors and not mere interpreters.

³⁰ Daniël van der Velden, “Research and Destroy: Graphic Design as Investigation.” *Metropolis M*, no. 2 (2006).

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